



2007

State of the

City Address

Mayor Harry J Tutunjian

February 1, 2007

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President Bauer, City Council Members, Distinguished Guests, including recently elected Assemblyman Tim Gordon, fellow Troy residents, and the Action Team, thank you for taking the time to share this wonderful evening with me.

The charge of delivering an address to eloquently sum up the entire state of Troy can be a cause for trepidation. I remember the first time I stood here in front of a large crowd. It was nerve racking. Not tonight. Tonight is special for a number of reasons, but first and foremost it provides us the opportunity to enlighten the entire region that there is a wonderful transformation occurring here.

In case you have not noticed, Troy is changing. Too often the word renaissance is tossed around without merit, used in an attempt to drum up support for something that does not actually exist. I assure you that what is happening in Troy is legitimate. This great City, the home of Uncle Sam, is rising up once again. Tonight, you will find out how. You will meet some of the people making it happen, and it is my hope that you will join in the enthusiasm so many people have for our wonderful City.

There is a belief that many residents in the place we call home have heard it all before. Unfortunately, past developers posing as individual saviors have left a bad taste in the mouths of many. The people of Troy have indeed heard it all, but through a dynamic collective effort, the time is right for them to start to see it all.

From my perspective, choosing the highlight of this rebirth is simple- the fact that new development, new people, and new business coming to Troy is not nearly complete, but occurring as we speak. It will be happening six months from now. A year from now, and so on.

Recent success is apparent all around us. The Powers Park Lofts project is not just complete; it is nearly full of residents enjoying the unique living conditions in beautiful Lansingburgh. Not resting on their laurels, Jeff and Deane Pfeil have purchased and renamed the former Stanley Building in the heart of downtown. Now the Conservatory, the Pfeil's promise of redevelopment on the corner of Third and State Streets is not off in the distance. It's happening now. In fact, just this afternoon, they told me they expect to have their first tenant move in this spring!

Last year I had the pleasure of meeting Charles Jewett, a friend of Jeff and Deane, who was interested in rehabilitating the Tavern Building on Broadway. He had a plan to convert the former bar into high-end apartments for college students. Charles has begun to restore this beautiful building, but not without adding another project to his portfolio. He has acquired the Trojan Tap Room from the City of Troy, and plans to bring a style of living to Troy that has not been seen in many, many years. These are two buildings that were in jeopardy of structural failure now being saved for future generations.

Jeff, Deane and Charles are all in attendance tonight, and I believe we should thank them for two important reasons. The first is that they are pursuing ventures that will improve an aspect of downtown on a consistent, much-needed basis. More Residents. Not state employees or visitors, but people who will call downtown home. These are people that do not just talk about saving historic structures; they act on it. They do not wait for someone else to do the job; they jump right in and get to work. That is commendable and I thank each of you for your commitment to our City.

It is possible to have more people living downtown because we are growing at a brilliant pace.

On the wall of my office I keep a piece of each ribbon from every ceremonial cutting I attend. Recently I looked at the businesses that opened in the past year, and began to think about the folks involved with those moments. I came to a realization that so many of these entrepreneurs have an amazing amount of energy.

Troy was lucky in 2006 to be infused with great talent, great drive, and the great desire of new business owners to not only want to succeed, but make their community better at the same time. Beginning this month, on the last Friday of each month, downtown businesses will do what has long been unheard of in Troy. They will stay open late. Cafés, art galleries, antiques shops, bookstores, and restaurants. The event will be called Troy Night Out, and it has come about because of hard work of new people in our community.

Elizabeth Young from Living Room, Donna Ford from the Many Hands Gift Gallery, Karen Schlesinger from the Digital Artists Space, and Michael Fiske from The Kismet Gallery have formed the group organizing the monthly event. Each of these people made the conscious decision to set up shop in Troy. Each is full of new ideas on how to improve everyday life here, and I want to formally welcome each of them to Troy.

Please circle the final Friday of each month on your calendars and help support this exciting initiative. While you are circling, you can also mark down June 16th for the 4th Annual River Street Festival.

Last year's event brought more than 10,000 people to River Street on a stormy Saturday in June. It is people like Dana Rudolph, donating her time working closely with City staff, which allows events like the River Street Festival to happen.

It is because of the initiative from people like Simone and Paul from Al Baraki that new festivals sprout up. Later this summer, Troy will play host to the 2nd Annual Lebanese Festival, a grand opportunity to learn about another culture.

When people happen upon these festivals, or visit other events like the Victorian Stroll, which also enjoyed a record number of revelers this year, they will see the change.

If they walk down Broadway they will stumble upon two dazzling new restaurants- Tosca Grille and The Golden Fox. The two respective owners of those establishments, Larry Schepici and Joseph Greco have added a new dimension to fine dining in the City of Troy. Walk past either of these places in the next few weeks, take a look at all of the customers inside, and you will gain an even greater understanding of this change I am referring to.

Around the block from those two new establishments is a unique café called Spill'n The Beans. Owned by Nick Porsia, Spill'n The Beans is the type of success story we love to hear. Before opening his new eatery, Nick was trying to decide whether to open up shop in Troy, or Bennington, Vermont. He chose us. And we could not be happier. Thank you Nick for your belief in Troy.

For those that do not know, Spill'n The Beans is located in John Scanlon's Market Block. Just four years ago this was another vacant building in Troy, with little hope of revitalization. Today it holds two of the most unique stores in the area, Aurora's Willow Creek, and the Broken Mold, owned by Bianca Dupree, who recently celebrated her one-year anniversary here. It is anchored by Market Block Books, its new café, and has but one vacant storefront remaining. That is a remarkable accomplishment.

Though its success should come as no surprise. The owner of the historic structure is John Hedley, who has done more privately than just about anyone to allow this comeback of ours to occur. The Market Block is one of John's latest projects, and like the others, it is already an impressive success.

One of the big stories of 2006 was John deciding to sell his properties along River Street. Some people were nervous about the sale, thinking Troy would lose a valuable asset. I will never forget what John said to me shortly after delivering the news that he had a deal in place to sell Hedley Park Place and Flannigan Square.

“Harry, I’m just a used car salesman. These guys are legitimate. They are the type of developers that will bring more developers to Troy.”

I smiled. It was John’s classic line, but it turned out he was right. I have had the pleasure of meeting with Kevin Bette from First Columbia many times since he first decided to come to Troy, and I can tell you he is a man with great vision, and the plans that he has for the neighborhoods surrounding his new River Street endeavor bring new meaning to the word revitalization. I would like to thank John and Kevin for their work in the past, and the exciting ventures to come in the future. Thank you both.

With the amount of change occurring in the City of Troy it is difficult to sum it up in a small story. But I’m going to try anyway.

Last month, I attended a ribbon cutting at the Movement Lab on the corner of 4th and State Streets. Owned and operated by Julie Rose and Jamie King, we were being interviewed by a local news station when a reporter asked Julie why she decided to get in on the renaissance in Troy- her words, not mine. Without skipping a beat Julie described moving to Troy within the last two years and realizing that we had a lack of Pilates in Troy.

That was a great moment for me. My job would be complete if I could just worry about keeping the streets clean and safe, provided I can hear a wonderful quote like that every now and then. So Julie, thank you for coming tonight. Thank you for coming to Troy, and we wish you the best of luck fulfilling all of the Pilates needs in Troy.

These stories are wonderful and put a human touch on the exciting moments that occur here each week. Individually they appear to be blips on the radar, but combined they are something to treasure. Something our residents can see and appreciate. After all, this is for them, and I am honored to be a part of it.

I am sure skeptics will remain. For them we have old-fashioned hard data.

Between 1996 and 2003, the City of Troy Planning Board reviewed an average of 89 cases per year. In 2004 that number jumped to 100. The following year it reached 130 cases. And last year we heard a remarkable 154 plans discussed. That is a 90 percent increase in activity in just three years, and includes reviews of many building expansions, new restaurants, historical preservation requests, and condominiums.

Included in those 154 reviews is the initial appearance by the United-Hedley development team that is pursuing the Congress-Ferry Street reconstruction. For the better part of 18 months, stakeholders from the City of Troy, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy Housing Authority, and Rensselaer County have met every two weeks to work out the details on this ambitious project.

Just last night, a vitally important step was taken as the City sponsored a public hearing on the road reconstruction. Soon a road option will be chosen, each stakeholder will sign an agreement with United-Hedley, and an Environmental Impact Statement will be developed. This accelerated path should see construction by early spring in 2008, if not sooner.

The City's role in economic development is straightforward. When we can help monetarily- we do. If we can guide people through the planning process, streamlining many areas- we do. If there is nothing we can do to help- we do anyway.

As of today, there are 122 businesses in our Empire Zone. During 2005 there was more than \$11 million in capital improvements by these businesses. Last year we were fortunate to add an additional eleven new certified businesses into the Empire Zone, equaling an impressive \$26.8 million in investments.

Troy's Industrial Development Authority authorized four additional PILOT programs, which are often criticized by those that do not truly understand the benefit of new development. These four PILOT programs will generate \$34.5 million of capital investment in 2007.

Sondra Little, our economic development coordinator, has done a wonderful job leveraging an additional influx of funds from New York State through the Main Street Grant program. We received \$200,000 in grants from this program in 2006, \$157,500 of which has been committed and is expected to produce \$9.1 million in rehabilitation to buildings in the targeted Main Street area.

One of those projects is the recently announced Troy Food Co-Op, led by Alane Hohenberg. Alane is working with a group of motivated individuals to renovate the old Pioneer Food Market on Congress Street. A place for the residents of downtown to grocery shop is of utmost importance- both now and for the future.

The City of Troy recognizes the importance and energy behind this project and has awarded Alane's group \$20,000 from the Main Street Grant Program and \$20,000 from the Economic Development Assistance program. We will do all that we can to move this project along so that it may benefit everyone as soon as possible. And thank you Alane for having the vision to bring such excitement to downtown.

Where we can help we will. In total, capital investments in 2007 that have received support from the City of Troy, the IDA, and the Troy LDC economic development programs is a remarkable \$45.6 million.

Despite this there will still be those that will say the City is not doing enough to bring development to Troy. To them I point to the activities of the Troy Local Development Corporation, led by Deputy Mayor Dan Crawley. In 2006, the LDC, through the City of Troy acquired three separate parcels of land along the Hudson River. Ten years from now I will certainly not be the Mayor of Troy. The men and women sitting behind me will not be City Council members. But we will be able to say we served the people of Troy during its turning point.

The purchase of the former King Fuels and Portec sites in South Troy has given the City almost unlimited options for redevelopment. While the remediation of the King Fuels site must be completed before action occurs, we are already in the process of marketing this valuable land to interested parties. Soon we will have access to 35 acres of land that will provide massive prospects for clean technology, access to rail and barge, and remarkable River access.

With this excitement comes a promise. We will not duplicate the mistakes so many others have made in the past. We will not settle. We will not sell ourselves short. I promise you that.

There is similar excitement for riverfront parcels to the north at the site of the former Jack's Junkyard. Though many do not realize it now, this acquisition will have an even more profound impact on its neighborhood than the King Fuels property. As Mayor, I look at the challenge of cleaning up North Central as integral in our future success. The former Jack's property is currently being looked at as a park so that the community can enjoy the benefits the Hudson River has to offer.

This riverfront property can be used as a park because of the remarkable projects happening in and around North Central. As many of you are aware, developers from Europe have purchased the Mooradian's Building on River Street and plan to redevelop it into luxury condos with riverfront views, coffee shops and wine bars.

We fully realize there is much work left to do here, as recent police activities in North Central have shown. But the fact remains that potential for this type of investment here did not exist four years ago.

I believe that having the vision to look down the road, to dream about what this City can be, is vital. To be able to take a leap of faith when someone tells you they have an idea that is surprising? That is vital. Such was the leap I recently took when I was told someone wanted to put a hotel in downtown Troy. Not in Proctor's, but in the parking lot next to City Hall.

Believe it. Later this month we will meet with the City Council to discuss the transfer of this City property to developers interested in building a hotel not 100 yards from where you sit tonight. Their plans include dramatic improvements to parking in the area, as well as the promise of more people. Many people. Visiting Troy for various reasons, and coming back for others, like the Golden Fox, or Living Room, or the Kismet Gallery.

Suspend your beliefs, because amazing things are about to start happening around us. As you watch these progressions, do so with the knowledge that my administration will not be lax in our most important duties-providing services to the people who call Troy home.

We have learned in the past three years that the small things truly do count. For years, the Alamo, a piece of land across from the Rensselaer County Jail, was open only once a year. We opened it on the third Saturday of each month, and the response was terrific. We opened it on every Saturday in October, and more than 225 different households responded.

Last January, the City suffered a tragedy when an 8-month-old child lost her life in a terrible fire. Inside the apartment, the tenants were using different devices to heat their bedrooms. It was an issue that should have never occurred, and it spawned the Zero Tolerance approach to Code Enforcement, a small idea in its original inception.

During the early spring, some people tried to blame this zero tolerance approach for the demolitions of long neglected buildings. In fact, zero tolerance has nothing to do with it. The zero tolerance approach will save buildings, not tear them down. Once again, despite faulty rumors, the numbers do not lie.

After instituting a zero tolerance hotline the number of calls we received jumped dramatically. In 2006, our code enforcement officers responded to 725 Housing and code complaints, while making nearly one thousand re-inspection visits.

Half way through the year, we heard comments from irresponsible landlords that the City of Troy was making it too difficult to allow an apartment through the inspection process. I assure you this is something you will never hear an apology for. The crackdown on irresponsible landlords is something we have long searched for an answer to. Zero tolerance is not the end all answer, but it is an important piece of the puzzle.

This approach was developed because of a tragic fire, and our belief that we could help reduce future problems. Despite an increase in number of calls the fire department received last year, nearly 15 percent, the number of fires actually decreased by more than 20 percent. In 2006, the number of 2, 3, and 5-alarm fires numbered 9. In 2005, that number was 25.

Furthermore, in the year following the implementation of zero tolerance, we did not have a fire-related death in the City of Troy. Four people lost their lives the previous year.

One year ago tonight we announced that the City of Troy would be bring HUD-funded programs in-house in an effort to provide better efficiency and services to those who actually need help.

We have yet to hit our full stride on these programs, yet I can stand here tonight and tell you that each is absolutely an unmitigated success.

The Homeowners Code Compliant Grant Program was the first program to fire on all cylinders. Though it only began in July, the program assisted more than 45 homeowners in Troy last year on a variety of issues including: new roofs, furnaces, and boilers, lead paint hazards, window replacements, interior and exterior electrical work, carpentry and paint, masonry, and emergency sewer and fence repair.

Those 45 projects represent more assistance than the groups who provided these services in the past accomplished over five years combined. That is yet another staggering number. A total of \$280,076 in HUD funding was spent to bring these buildings up to code. By July of this year, this program will have serviced 100 homes in Troy.

By providing these repairs, residents were allowed to continue to live in their homes, prevented buildings from becoming vacant and falling into disrepair.

This is the very definition of preservation. Last year the City of Troy spent \$110,000 demolishing buildings that were eyesores in different neighborhoods. Despite what you may have heard through rumor and innuendo, we spent nearly four times as much, \$400,000, attempting to restore and rehabilitate historic structures.

This spring, construction will begin on ten new homes along Project Road that will be sold to income eligible residents. It is called the Troy Homes project, and these new houses are part of the first phase of an initiative aimed at giving people a chance.

The homes will be sold to people that will be looking for their first home, and in many cases, those living in public housing. They will be sold to people fighting to make a better life for themselves. These houses will be on the tax rolls, they will strengthen neighborhoods, and they will make dreams come true.

The qualified candidates will be chosen from the City of Troy Homebuyers Incentive Program, which began in July as well. The results of this program are all the proof you need that the City made the right move bringing this funding in-house.

Tonight I welcome Hector and Francis Sanchez to City Hall. This young couple and their two boys were the first family to take advantage of this housing program. Working with Troy, Hector and Francis have purchased their first home on West Sunnyside Street.

As former residents of Griswold Heights, they told me just before Christmas that without this program, which provides the down payments on homes, it would have been several years before they were able to purchase a house. I said at the time that they were the first to successfully navigate the program, but they would not be the last.

In fact, in the past six weeks, five more families have purchased a home using this initiative. Another seven homebuyers are lined up to close on new homes in the next month, bringing the total federal dollars spent on this to \$190,500. We expect to have helped more than 20 families purchase new homes by this summer.

I want to take a moment to thank the six City Council members behind me that had the guts and belief in my administration to approve the transfers of the money in-house that allow success stories like this to occur. I am sure Hector and Francis would thank you. The people of Troy thank you.

Many thanks go to Comptroller Deborah Witkowski for continuing to succeed no matter the task that is thrown to her. Deborah has overseen the transfer of these programs and worked with city staff to ensure that all the steps are followed correctly, and that the initiatives will work.

She is also one of the main reasons I can stand before you tonight and say without a hint of hesitation that the City of Troy is in the best shape financially in more than 20 years. Our bond rating has increased, our debt continues to shrink, and I pledge to find new revenues that will allow us to not punish the residents with future tax increases because of the missteps of past leaders.

Since taking office on January 1, 2004 this administration has met the challenge to do more with less. We have cut more than \$600,000 in annual patronage positions, and replaced them with jobs that answer to the residents of Troy. Gone are redundant positions like policy analyst, director of information services, and ombudsman. In the place of those there are more police officers on the street, and there are self-sufficient positions like that of Grants Writer.

When we hired Bill Roehr to be the grants writer, we hoped that it would become a job that would more than pay for itself each year. We were correct. In 2006, thanks to the diligent work of Bill, the City of Troy was awarded more than \$5.2 million in grants. That is an astounding number that will help us in many areas of Troy, including the rehabilitation of buildings for the Upper Hudson Rivers and Estuaries Center, funding for the master plan of the Congress-Ferry Street Project, and the continued redesign of Riverfront Park.

Among the list of grants we received in 2006 were two \$77,000 grants from New York State that will place a Troy Police Officer inside both Troy High School and Lansingburgh High School as School Resource Officers. When the City Council passed legislation instituting a school curfew in 2004, we preached that no student should have to attend high school and feel intimidated by groups of people that simply do not have respect for others. I look at these two resource officers as an extension of that safety net, and I am proud that we were able to help our respective school districts reach this goal.

Throughout the school year, I am often invited to visit different classrooms in the City of Troy. Many classrooms also come to City Hall to visit. And whether it is the students at New Turnpike Elementary, Rensselaer Park, Our Lady of Victory, School 18, Carroll Hill or School 12, I continually am left with the same feeling- we are in great hands.

The children that I have the opportunity to visit with are thoughtful, intelligent, humorous, and more than capable of acting as the stewards of our future. Our goal in the City of Troy should be to do everything in our power to make sure that these children are equipped with the tools that they need for a bright future. Education is the biggest piece of the puzzle.

For years the City of Troy has been lax in its services to young people. We have not done enough. That is also changing. In 2007 you will see great strides made thanks to the hard work and forward thinking of two City employees- Police Captain John Reigert and Bill Roehr. Last year John and Bill collaborated to submit a grant

to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services entitled “Juvenile Delinquency Reduction Strategy.”

These two gentlemen were successful in their application, bringing in \$655,000 to Troy, which we will use to implement a comprehensive truancy abatement program. Working in conjunction with a Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition, the City of Troy will set the bar high when employing this strategy.

This will not be a program that has a couple of truant officers traveling around the city looking for kids that should be in school. This will be a program that addresses problems at the core. We will work with parents, children, school administrators, and teachers to make sure we are not just getting results, but that we are making a difference.

The branches that extend off of this program will allow us to carry out a multitude of new services provided by the Troy Police Department, including the formation of a Juvenile Unit to handle cases involving young people that are both victims and suspects, it will significantly increase training in these areas, and provide a continuing crackdown on adolescents engaged in criminal activity.

Beyond the Juvenile Delinquency Reduction Strategy, this summer we will strengthen our summer program for all the kids in Troy. For the first time in many years, the Frear Park Ice Rink was home to a summer camp in 2006.

The inspiration for this was developed out of the monthly meetings I hold with African-American clergy members, including Reverend Eric Shaw who is here tonight, as well as conversations with parents around Troy, discussing opportunities children need. The first year of the program was a terrific success. While the basis of the camp dealt with basketball, taught by Earl Harrison and Al Prater, it was not unusual to walk into the arena and see a game of kickball the Guinness Book of World records would be proud of. Some kids would be playing board games, others enjoying the sprinklers in the park.

I cannot tell you how happy this made me. The number one incentive of the program is clear. Kids smiling. Whether they were white or black, from South Troy, Lansingburgh or Sycaway they were having fun. And doing it together. Our future is indeed bright, and I pledge we will continue to make great efforts to expand the opportunities for every child in Troy that seeks one.

Opportunities are what Troy should be about. For children. For adults. For developers. For preservationists. For shop owners. For college students. For investors. For all of us.

Michael DelPrete and his friends know all about opportunity. I had the pleasure to meet this RPI graduate a few months ago after his business, Agora Games, moved into a suite at the newly renovated 359 Broadway. These gentlemen are working on cutting edge technology in video games. I will encourage you to invest now; they are going accomplish great things.

They started here. They went to the Rensselaer Tech Park following graduation. And then they moved to downtown Troy. Wherever life takes this company, they are an example to many people. Not just college students, but all of the children in Troy. Their parents as well.

In closing, I want to thank a group of people that make my job possible, the dedicated employees in the City of Troy. Whether it's the Action Team in green cleaning the streets, Public Utilities fixing water main breaks, the police and firefighters keeping each of us safe, or the often overlooked employees in City Hall that work hard

each day, these are the people that allow Troy to change. They care about this City tremendously, and I thank them for their continued knowledge, support and guidance.

Great things have happened in Troy. Great things are happening in Troy. And Great things will happen in Troy. Come along for the ride, it will truly be exciting.

Thank you. Good night and God bless.